Minorities now in the majority in Charlotte (Charlotte Observer – March 22, 2011)

Greg Johnson and Judy Galindo have helped change the face - and complexion - of Charlotte. Johnson is an African-American marketing executive who moved back to his home state last summer. Galindo is a native of Colombia who came to launch a Spanish-language paper last fall. They're part of an influx of blacks and Hispanics who have accelerated the growth and diversity of Charlotte and North Carolina. So much so that over the past decade, Charlotte's non-Hispanic white population dipped below 50 percent for the first time. It now accounts for 45 percent of city residents, according to the 2010 Census. That's down from 55 percent just 10 years ago. That mirrors a trend that appeared not only in Greensboro and Winston-Salem over the last decade but in Tampa and Orlando, Fla., and at least a dozen other cities, according to demographer William Frey of the Brookings Institution. Whites are now a minority in almost two-thirds of the nation's largest cities. The census also showed more people flocked to suburbs in the Charlotte area, shifting the centers of population gravity in counties like Union and Iredell. The changes, which reflect the growing urbanization and diversity of North Carolina, will shape everything from politics to education to business. "In some ways it's been just phenomenal," Frey says of the state's growth. "The cities are becoming more multi-ethnic, black, white and Hispanic rather than just black and white." Among the changes: Charlotte's Hispanic population nearly doubled from 7.4 percent in 2000 to 13 percent. The number of Hispanics in Charlotte - nearly 96,000 - exceeds the total population of Asheville. African-Americans make up 35 percent of the city's population, up from 32.7 percent. The city added 79,277 black residents. That's more than the population of Concord. Indian Trail in Union County and Mooresville in Iredell County, both fast-growing suburbs, eclipsed their respective county seats in population. Once-small towns such as Huntersville exploded. It grew 87 percent and is now bigger than Kannapolis and Hickory. No county in the state grew faster than Union, and no towns in the Charlotte region grew faster than a handful of western Union County suburbs. That was thanks to people like Chris Carmichael. He left the Chicago area last June with his wife and three children for a job with an uptown bank. After looking at homes in Charlotte, they liked the amenities of Union County. "It was just so much different than anything we saw in Myers Park or SouthPark," says Carmichael, 40. "It was part the quality of the home you get for the price, the school system and tax base."

Greg Johnson

When Greg Johnson decided to move his family back East after 15 years in Oregon, North Carolina was just one of several options for the 43-year-old Rocky Mount native. "As I remembered it, I thought it was probably a little slower than I like," says Johnson, who started a job with a South End advertising firm in July. "I wanted a faster, progressive city. But when we

visited Charlotte we were incredibly impressed." North Carolina, the nation's 10th-largest state, has the sixth-highest African-American population, according to Frey. A few years ago, Charlotte trailed only Atlanta and Dallas in black net migration into the city, much of it fueled by jobs or kinship. That's reflected in voter registration numbers. In 2000, blacks accounted for 27 percent of Charlotte's voters and 23 percent of Mecklenburg County's. Today they make up 35 percent of the city's and 30 percent of the county's. That helped account for the 100,000-vote margin Barack Obama piled up in Mecklenburg in 2008 as he eked out a 14,000-vote victory in North Carolina. A year later it helped Anthony Foxx become Charlotte's first Democratic mayor in 22 years. "Clearly the urban counties are much more friendly to Democrats than Republicans," says John Davis, a political analyst in Raleigh. "This is true throughout America. But that includes urban white residents."

Judy Galindo

Judy Galindo moved to Charlotte from Florida last fall to launch the weekly Hola Noticias. "Charlotte is a fast-growing community with endless possibilities of career growth for a professional Latina," she says. "North Carolina and Charlotte in particular, offered a lot of potential for our company and myself, thanks to a vibrant Hispanic community." North Carolina's Hispanic population jumped 111 percent last decade, to just more than 800,000. It now has the 11th-largest Latino population in the country. It's all part of a broader trend that Jim Johnson, a business demographer at UNC Chapel Hill, calls the "browning" and "graying" of America. "In this respect, North Carolina and Mecklenburg County are a microcosm of the nation as a whole," he says. He says the trend will continue. For one thing, with many white women postponing families, non-Hispanic whites are aging faster than they're producing children. The median age of the white population nationally is 41 compared to 27 for Hispanics. In North Carolina the median age of Hispanics is just 23.

'Racial and ethnic diversity'

Though Hispanic numbers have swelled, Davis believes they're "another decade away from having a political presence." But demographic shifts already are affecting business. Galindo's newspaper, for example, was started to serve the mushrooming Hispanic community. Johnson says businesses such as homebuilders and health providers will have to deal with an aging population. Schools also will feel the changes when it comes to issues such as bond votes. "You have an education system," he says, "that is becoming more black and brown and a taxpaying, voting population that is becoming more empty-nesters (with) no dog in the public education fight." According to Brookings' Frey, the changes are generally positive. "It shows there's growth (and) increasing racial and ethnic diversity among people who can have

connections globally," he says. "When I think of North Carolina I think of opportunity and America's future. There's only a few states you can put in that category."